

# Charlotte Chapel, Edinburgh: Evangelical Social Involvement

IAN L.S. BALFOUR, M.A., LL.B., B.D., Ph.D.

## Background

The church that is now Charlotte Chapel, in Rose Street, Edinburgh, was constituted in 1808 in the Pleasance district of the city. Ten years later, the Scottish Episcopalians vacated their church in Rose Street, which they called Charlotte Chapel, and moved across Princes Street to the newly built Church of St John the Evangelist. The founding pastor of the Pleasance church, Christopher Anderson, bought the vacant building, which seated 750, and kept the name. In 1911, the members demolished the original Chapel and replaced it with the one we have today – except for the lounge, which was added in 1983. The new sanctuary seated exactly one thousand, and for most of the next 70 years it was well filled, often to overflowing, on Sunday morning and Sunday evening.<sup>1</sup>

For the bicentenary of the constitution, this year, I was asked to prepare a history, which has been published as *Revival in Rose Street*.<sup>2</sup> Your President, in reviewing it for *The Baptist Quarterly*, suggested that the Chapel's social involvement, throughout the years, might be of interest to you.

One of my sons, having read the book, remarked that there was nothing in it about prison reform or dismantling apartheid in South Africa. That is fair comment; members have contributed, as individuals, to these and other public concerns, but the Chapel has not, as a church,

---

<sup>1</sup> Footnote references are given in this paper only if they are not available on the CD supplied with I.L.S. Balfour, *Revival in Rose Street* (Edinburgh, 2007) on which this paper is based.

<sup>2</sup> Published privately; copies available at Wesley Owen, 117-119 George Street, Edinburgh, the Chapel bookstall on Sundays, or by emailing [info@charlottechapel.org](mailto:info@charlottechapel.org).

taken a stance on social issues other than Sunday Observance and temperance. This paper may explain “why not?” It covers three areas:

- (1) Financially supporting worthy causes, motivated by compassion, which has been generous, altruistic and unconditional.
- (2) Pioneering half-a-dozen local social-amelioration projects, motivated by compassion but inspired by evangelism.
- (3) Taking a public stand on Sunday Observance and temperance, motivated by concern for people’s welfare and for God’s honour.

There is no time to do more than mention three other aspects of the Chapel’s social involvement: (1) pastoral care; since 1907, the Chapel has employed a full-time deaconess (now called a “pastoral care worker”) and since 1981, a male equivalent as well; (2) Scout and Guide Troops, run in the Chapel’s name and on its premises since 1919, training youngsters in “whole-life” development; (3) overseas involvement; between 1821 and the Ter-jubilee in 1958, 102 members (58 women and 44 men), were commissioned and supported for doctoring, nursing, teaching, church building and evangelising in Palestine, Syria, Africa, India, China and South America.

### **First main area: Financially supporting worthy causes**

Supporting worthy causes, motivated by compassion, has, as mentioned, been generous, altruistic and unconditional. Two examples from the first hundred years are: (1) year-on-year support for Edinburgh Royal Infirmary, and (2) a typical response to a special appeal. Other churches undoubtedly gave more, but the Chapel’s gifts came from a congregation where, in Christopher Anderson’s words, there was “not one opulent member”.<sup>3</sup>

---

<sup>3</sup> H. Anderson, *The Life and Letters of Christopher Anderson* (Edinburgh, 1854), 315.

### Edinburgh Royal Infirmary

Until the creation of the National Health Service in 1948, the Infirmary relied on voluntary donations; it received no public funding and never required payment for treatment or care. When, in 1808, Christopher Anderson constituted the church in the Pleasance, the Infirmary was a 228-bed building located two hundred yards away, in the High School Yards, off Infirmary Street, opposite the east end of Chambers Street. Anderson passionately taught his congregation that no Christian could withhold support for it without loss of respect.

When, in 1879, the Infirmary moved to Lauriston Place, the Chapel was running an annual deficit of £25 on its general account; only personal approaches to selected members every December balanced the books. £25 may not seem much today, but a male secretary earned £30 a year, a good cook earned £28, and a kitchen maid £14 a year. People like these made up the majority of the congregation, so their regular giving to the Edinburgh Royal Infirmary may reasonably be described as “sacrificial”.

Support continued even when, in 1907, the Chapel was urgently and unsuccessfully trying to raise money to rebuild the premises in Rose Street. Looking at the Infirmary offering for 1907, the pastor, Joseph Kemp, commented: “we might do more for this noble Institution”.

For eighty-eight years, from 1890 to 1978, Chapel members (as well as many others) conducted half-hour Sunday services in one or more wards in the Infirmary. At first, volunteers were few and teams had to move from ward to ward, repeating a short service. As numbers grew, a full half-hour of singing and Scripture reading was possible in every ward. All went smoothly until 1913, when the Infirmary chaplain withdrew permission; he had difficulty in attracting a congregation to the service that he held in the Infirmary chapel, and he blamed “the competition”.

The Chapel workers and others formed the Sacred Song Union, which pointed out to the infirmary managers that the chaplain never got more than 70 to the chapel, while the teams could take hymns and a

message to all 850 patients on the wards. Ward services were resumed in November 1913, and by 1921, there were enough volunteers to cover the adjoining Simpson Maternity Pavilion as well; services were later held in the Leith Hospital also. The Sacred Song Union assumed responsibility for administering the large number of people involved, from many churches, but its annual meetings were held in Charlotte Chapel. Except for the years of the Second World War, ward services continued until 1978.

### **A public appeal**

A second example of unconditional giving is the response, in 1901, to *The Scotsman* newspaper's "Shilling Fund" appeal (5 new pence), to provide relief for widows and orphans of British soldiers killed in the Boer Wars. During February 1901, 40 shillings were collected in the Borders town of Hawick – "a town which has been as generous to the Fund as almost any Border district".<sup>4</sup> In the same month, the Chapel raised 80 shillings, twice as much as Hawick,<sup>5</sup> by fund-raising "cinematograph entertainments". "Motion pictures" or "cinematograph" (as it was known) had come to Edinburgh five years previously, in 1896. The pictures were flickering, soundless, disjointed and frequently broke down, but the Chapel put on shows that packed the building and raised 80 shillings.

### **Recent appeals**

The generosity of 1901 has been repeated many times, but successful appeals now have a different rationale. Neither the beneficiaries of the 1901 gifts (widows and orphans) nor the agency administering the gifts (*The Scotsman* newspaper) were church-based. Humanitarian needs still determine the beneficiaries, but gifts nowadays are hugely more generous if they are to be channelled through church-based organisations. Collections are taken for equally deserving secular

---

<sup>4</sup> *The Scotsman*, 22 Feb. 1901.

<sup>5</sup> *Ibid.*



charities, with equally reliable local workers, for equally deserving beneficiaries, but they are much less well supported. Let me illustrate from three events in 2005.

Following the tsunami devastation on Boxing Day 2004, £18,200 was donated over the following weekend, after pulpit announcements stressed that local church-based groups would organize the relief. That was also the “selling point”, if one may use the phrase, when Niger’s harvest failed in July 2005; £8,650 was sent through The Evangelical Alliance Relief Fund. When an earthquake devastated North India, Pakistan and Kashmir in October of that same year, £6,000 was contributed as soon as the Baptist Missionary Society was chosen to distribute the aid. (Donations are rounded up from general funds.) Has the channel become as important as the destination? It would seem so, from the bicentenary weekend in October 2008.

The bicentennial appeal had home and overseas components. It asked for £20,000 toward replacing two of Edinburgh City Mission’s motor vehicles, their “Carevan”, which goes out nightly with food and warm drinks and clothing for the homeless, and the minibus that transports volunteers to their Night Care Shelters. Another £20,000 was targeted, to build a Community Health Centre for a tribe on the India-Nepal border, among whom one of the Chapel members has worked for many years. To ask a church membership of 650 to give £40,000 over one weekend, for Edinburgh’s homeless and for a remote Indian tribe, seemed over-optimistic. However, with the focus on the church-based agencies that would handle the money, the weekend brought in £68,800.

**Second main area:** Pioneering half-a-dozen local social-amelioration projects, motivated by compassion but inspired by evangelism

Although this paper is entitled: “evangelical social involvement”, the adjective “evangelistic” might be a better word. When members gave their time and energy to social amelioration, motivated by compassion, most were hoping for spiritual as well as material results. For example,

between Christmas and New Year in 1907 and again in 1908, the Chapel hired the Corn Exchange for five days and provided accommodation and meals for two thousand men and women living rough in the city. The report on the week ended: "The Chapel choir sang and gave brief messages. No response was recorded to the gospel message, but the organisers remained hopeful";<sup>6</sup> in other words, they were motivated by compassion, but inspired by evangelism. Joseph Kemp distinguished the Chapel's social involvement from the prevalent Social Gospel, which he described as "a danger that must not be treated lightly".<sup>7</sup> I'll come back to the Social Gospel, but two projects at the beginning of the Chapel's second hundred years illustrate how social concern went hand-in-hand with evangelism.

### 1908 – The White House

In 1908, destitution and prostitution went hand in hand on Edinburgh's streets. If girls came to Edinburgh for work and were unable to find it, some sought an easy way of making a living. Chapel women, coming out of meetings into Rose Street, were confronted by the spiritual darkness of its nineteen public houses. What could they offer to those who wanted to make a fresh start? It was not enough to lead them to Christ – what about their future? In January 1908, Dr Maxwell Williamson, a deacon in the Chapel and soon to be appointed Chief Medical Officer of Health for Edinburgh, took up the challenge and opened a rescue centre for young women on the streets; it was called the "White House".<sup>8</sup>

Gifts poured in, some from women who had already been helped. One, saved at an open-air meeting, offered a month's free work to prepare the new home for occupancy. A lady member of the congregation went out "into the highways and the lanes and streets of the city", speaking to girls whom the White House might help.<sup>9</sup> It

---

<sup>6</sup> *Record*, 1908, 28; 1909, 18.

<sup>7</sup> *Record*, 1909, 133.

<sup>8</sup> *Record*, 1908, 16; 1923, 10 (Williamson's obituary).

<sup>9</sup> *Record*, 1909, 2.

accommodated twenty girls at a time, from age fourteen upward. Not only were they fed and clothed, but attempts were made to place them in good situations or to persuade them to return to their homes. At the same time, the power and claims of Christ were pressed on them.

There were some triumphs of grace, but there were disappointments as well. Many admitted to using the House only as a temporary lodging, without any intention of reforming their ways. Many of the girls were Roman Catholics, and they were not prepared to stay when they found they had to attend the Chapel services twice on Sunday and once during the week, as well as a Bible Class every Sunday afternoon in the White House. There was a fairly high turnover – in the first seven months, 78 girls came and 62 went.

The White House was maintained for nearly two years, but the running costs were more than the Chapel could afford. With regret, it closed in July 1910, after securing situations or homes for all of the girls.<sup>10</sup>

### 1912 – The Rock Mission

Dr Williamson, who set up the rescue centre just mentioned, was equally concerned for people who lived in lodging houses and derelict slums in the Grassmarket. He rented a hall in the Cowgate every Sunday afternoon, and provided free tea and sandwiches to all who were willing to listen to a gospel message afterward. He called it the Rock Mission, and he led it until his death in 1923. The Chapel then took it over, and ran it weekly for 64 years, until 1987. Both in the number of people involved and the length of their involvement, this was the Chapel's biggest-ever social activity. The work was difficult and largely unrewarding, but there were many willing helpers, one of whom wrote in 1926:

To us these men are not broken earthenware neither down-and-outs. We resent to hear them referred to as such. We see in them souls for whom Christ died and we have learnt to love them for His sake.<sup>11</sup>

---

<sup>10</sup> *Record*, 1910, 36, 113.

Every Sunday afternoon, the Chapel members served tea and sandwiches in the Cowgate hall, for men who lived rough in the Grassmarket area. This was followed by a short evangelistic service, and attracted about 80 men weekly; the men listened attentively and visitors remarked on both their good behaviour and their obvious attention to the service. The annual social in January brought in up to two hundred. Clothing was provided, and money for a bed in a lodging house. Numbers were steady throughout the year, even in the summer. The meeting was followed by heart-to-heart talks with some of the men and a few of them professed acceptance of Jesus as Saviour. That was when the real challenge began – “No work, no food, no decent clothing, and no bed is a test to try the faith of established Christians, far less of men old in sin, but young in the faith.”

In 1986, the Chapel reviewed the work of the Rock Mission. Most of the men and women now coming on Sunday afternoon were severely alcoholic; they required specialist counselling and support, which the Carrubbers Christian Centre in the High Street was now providing. Nearly all the people who attended the Rock also attended the Carrubbers Christian Centre, so it was agreed to merge their resources and to end the Sunday afternoon tea and gospel meeting.

### **The Social Gospel**

What did Joseph Kemp, the minister of Charlottc Chapel from 1902 to 1915, mean, when he distinguished the Chapel’s social involvement from the Social Gospel, which he called “a danger that must not be treated lightly”?<sup>12</sup>

As you know, Christians in every country with an Industrial Revolution were concerned about the inequalities and miseries it brought. Between the 1880s and the 1920s, diverse groups of American Christians combatted slum housing, bad hygiene and poor schooling under the banner of the Social Gospel, popularised by Charles M.

---

<sup>11</sup> *Record*, 1926, 72.

<sup>12</sup> *Record*, 1909, 133.



Sheldon's best-selling novel of 1896, *In His Steps or What Would Jesus Do?* Sheldon argued that society would be transformed if only people would face up to the question: "What Would Jesus Do?" His book was still popular half a century later, and I have a copy of it, given to me as a Sunday School prize at the age of 12 in 1944 (but not in Charlotte Chapel).

When the Social Gospel became popular in Scotland, Kemp was concerned for two reasons. First, he was premillennial in his theology, teaching that the Second Coming of Christ was imminent, and that Christians should devote their energies to evangelism. Social Gospel leaders were overwhelmingly post-millennial, believing that the Second Coming would not happen until humankind had rid itself of social evils by human effort.

Secondly, Social Gospellers preached collective social action as the Christian's primary duty in this world, in place of individual conversion-experience. An influential Social Gospel leader, Walter Rauschenbusch, taught that "sin" should not be attributed to individuals, but to society as a whole.<sup>13</sup> It was in society, not in individual lives, that sin must be fought and overcome. The theology of the Chapel and of the Social Gospel might be summed up as:

*Chapel*

Sin is individual and inherited

Evangelism is proclaiming the gospel

Vertical-relationship with God is key

Individuals are transformed by new birth

*Social Gospel*

sin is environmental and structural

evangelism is correcting social evils

horizontal-relationship with others is key

society is transformed by education and by legislation<sup>14</sup>

<sup>13</sup> W. Rauschenbusch, *Christianity and the Social Crisis* (New York, 1907).

<sup>14</sup> E.E. Cairns, *Christianity Through the Centuries* (Grand Rapids, 1996), 464.

Evangelical social action does seem to have had a low profile while the Social Gospel flourished, but in 1916 and in 1921 the Chapel initiated two long-term projects, which combined the vertical relationship with God through individual faith (always the first step) and the horizontal relationship with impoverished society (as an outworking of faith.) The first of these, chronologically, was:

### **1916 – The Jamaica Street Mission**

Chapel members delivered a four-page paper, *The Monthly Evangel*, to homes in the area. They were so concerned about the drab and depressing situation of people living in Jamaica Street – the service road for the lovely Heriot Row – that they secured the let of an empty shop and turned it into a meeting hall in October 1916, accommodating one hundred.

As this paper is about social involvement, there are no details here of evangelistic meetings and Bible studies, but scarcely a week went by without someone accepting Christ as Saviour; one of the Jamaica Street boys went into the ministry and another became a missionary. The first (and pleasant) surprise on the social side was when twenty young men, all over school age, said: “the mission hall is a sort of home ... we would not miss the Sunday afternoon lads’ class.” Similarly, a Tuesday evening women’s meeting filled a large place in the otherwise empty lives of the women in the district; attendance averaged between 40 and 50, sometimes up to 80. The younger women held a girls’ class on Wednesday, with an average attendance of 50, from which they formed a choir of sixteen to eighteen year old Jamaica Street girls. Christian Endeavour met on Thursday; the Friday evening Band of Hope grew and grew until seniors and juniors had to meet on different nights to get into the hall.

This worthwhile community involvement lasted for 36 years; it was discontinued only when the houses in Jamaica Street were scheduled for demolition in 1952.

### **1921 – The High Street Mission**

The tenements around the Tron Kirk, in Edinburgh’s High Street, were

areas of great social deprivation. Two young Chapel men had started an afternoon Sunday School in rented premises in 1913. Initially, two children came but by contacting parents, they built up friendship and confidence and soon had a midweek boys' club and a girls' sewing class as well as a Sunday School of 50 to 60. A gift from Santa Claus, at the end of the Christmas social, was the only Christmas present that many of the High Street children received.

When one of the founding members entered the ministry in 1921 and moved away, he asked the Chapel to take over the work. As with the Jamaica Street Mission, this paper does not cover directly evangelistic meetings, but after the Chapel purchased premises at 128 High Street, eleven different groups used them for a variety of social activities – study classes, women's meetings, girls' clubs for sewing and talking, and boys' clubs for games, reading or discussion. Many of those who came during the week came also to the Sunday School, where attendance averaged 150, with 26 teachers.

In the summer, they had open-air games and went on rambles. The annual picnic in June, usually to Riccarton, attracted up to three hundred children and mothers; no fathers came – "Women and children attended the Mission Hall but self-respecting working men did not."<sup>15</sup> Despite extensive canvassing, not one man ever turned up for a men's meeting; every effort was made to retain the interest of boys, but generally they disappeared as they grew into adolescence. The mission flourished until the outbreak of the Second World War in 1939; it was badly affected by wartime restrictions and closed in 1943.

The commitment of Chapel members to these three missions – the Rock, Jamaica Street and the High Street – may explain, at least in part, why the Chapel was not also active, as a church, in wider areas of social reform. If working people spent every evening of every week at the prayer meeting on Monday, the open-air on Tuesday, one of the

---

<sup>15</sup> A.L. Drummond & J. Bulloch, *The Church in Victorian Scotland, 1843-1874* (Edinburgh, 1975), 50; although written about the Victorian age, it accurately describes attitudes in the High Street in the 1920s.

missions on Wednesday, the Bible School on Thursday, a uniformed organisation on Friday, and the missions again on Saturday and Sunday – as they had to do, to keep these going – they had neither time nor vision for other areas. I believe that that is the key to what might seem a parochial outlook; the leaders may have had their reservations about the Social Gospel, but ordinary members saw that other people, Christians and non-Christians, were throwing their weight behind desirable social reforms, so they concentrated on the “corner of the vineyard” to which they felt called.

### **1956 –The Deaf and Dumb Christian Fellowship**

In May 1955, a widowed deaf woman, a Chapel member, felt a burden for others in her silent world; she invited them to a meeting in her kitchen every second Friday, and gradually others joined them. Soon they were meeting in larger premises every second Friday, and looking for somewhere to worship together on Sunday. In October 1956, the Chapel arranged simultaneous interpretation, by sign language, for the evening service. A room was equipped with a loudspeaker for the interpreters, and an epidiascope projected hymns and Scripture readings onto a screen. When the *Edinburgh Evening News* featured this in an article, two married couples came along and were converted.

About a dozen came regularly on Sunday evening, as well as meeting in a home, now every Friday, alternating Bible study and prayer with a social gathering. Some came to the Chapel on Sunday morning as well, and a member interpreted for them, in a reserved pew, for over 30 years. Forty attended their first weekend residential conference in October 1959. A family moved to Edinburgh from the south of England, so that their deaf daughter could enjoy the fellowship available here. “Signing” of the Chapel’s evening service continued until the late 1990s, when the last available interpreter, now in his 80s, could not persuade anyone else to take over.

There was never a corresponding Chapel involvement with the blind. An Edinburgh Torch Fellowship for the Blind was started in 1971, with 25 attending monthly Saturday meetings, but it was not a



Chapel initiative. The Chapel did, however, provide Braille hymnbooks and Scriptures at the regular Sunday services, and from 1992, the Chapel's tape librarian read the whole of the monthly *Charlotte Chapel Record* onto audiotape, for the benefit of the blind and partially sighted.<sup>16</sup>

### 1956 – an Eventide Home

I said that this paper would not cover social involvement for members, but setting up an Eventide Home in 1956 is mentioned, because latterly other churches were involved and, for the last decade, the majority of the residents were non-members.

In 1947, one of the Chapel deacons felt a burden for elderly members in tied accommodation, where the house went with the job; they had to leave it on retiring at 60 or 65, and many had nowhere to go. Retirement homes were almost unheard of in those days. After nine years of fundraising, a detached house in Newhaven Road, Leith, overlooking Victoria Park, was purchased and renovated, with accommodation for 14 residents, all in single rooms, and a staff of three. It was called Beulah Home.

Family worship twice a day, landline transmission of Chapel services and regular visits from Chapel auxiliaries, made Beulah "special" for fifty years. Local Authority inspections invariably concluded that Beulah provided a happy atmosphere and a high standard of care. However, in the 1990s, Beulah's *raison d'être* disappeared. Most people now had their own home, where they were supported by family or by social services until they needed hospital or nursing home care. Beulah could not be structurally adapted for a nursing home; by 2006, there were so many vacant rooms that it was reluctantly decided the Home could not continue. It closed at the end of September 2008.

---

<sup>16</sup> *Record*, December 1992, 7.

**Third main area:** Taking a public stand on Sunday Observance and temperance, motivated by concern for people's welfare and for God's honour.

### **Sunday Observance**

Until December 1901, staff on Edinburgh's tramcars enjoyed the traditional Sabbath rest, and the public walked to church. However, the Tramway Company wanted to increase its revenue, and so from December 1901 it operated 82 cable cars from 10 a.m. to 10 p.m. on Sunday. The congregation of Charlotte Chapel was "gathered" from all around the city, but many Chapel members (including Joseph Kemp) and many other Christians refused on principle to use them, for two reasons: (1) it was wrong to make staff work on Sunday, and (2) using Sunday trams would encourage the company to run even more. Until the First World War, my maternal grandparents walked their four children from Goldenacre to the Chapel and back, although trams ran from door to door; some in membership today recollect walking to and from the Chapel, twice every Sunday, until the outbreak of the Second World War in 1939.

In the 1930s, commercialisation began to undermine Sunday as a "different" day; Sidlow Baxter, the minister from 1935 to 1953, carried on a relentless campaign against "the beaming, bland-faced, Sabbath-commercialising Sunday-amusement agitator, [shopkeepers and cinema-owners], pretending to want his gayer Sunday for the benefit of the public ... whose real interest was increased profit". He urged Chapel members to find out the views of candidates in both municipal and parliamentary elections, and to vote for those who opposed shops, theatres and cinemas opening on Sunday.

In March 1955, the Chapel learned that Edinburgh Corporation, who owned Carrickknowe golf course, was planning to allow play on Sunday. The Chapel was not the only one to express concern, and its letter of protest, along with others, persuaded the Corporation not to

open the course.<sup>17</sup> Those now under the age of 60 may find it difficult to picture a Sunday in Edinburgh in the 1950s; the Sabbath meant that pubs were closed, hotels served alcohol to only *bona fide* travellers, no games or sports took place, swings in public parks were tied up, cold meals were served and many families (including ours) unplugged the television. It was a different and a special day. In the early 1960s, my wife and I gave hospitality to an American with the Billy Graham organization; we were genuinely horrified when he said, as we returned from the Sunday evening service, "Let's watch *Sunday Night at the Palladium* on BBC TV."

The Chapel saw Sunday Observance in black and white. When the Government proposed legislation in 1967, to allow some sport and commercial entertainment on Sunday, the Evangelical Alliance, of which the Chapel was a member, suggested working for an acceptable compromise. The Chapel rejected this and gave full support to the Lord's Day Observance Society, which opposed the Bill outright.<sup>18</sup>

It is said that when two principles conflict, the higher principle should prevail. In 1982, Ingliston Sunday market, beside Edinburgh airport, was attracting thousands of people from all over the country. The Chapel obtained permission to hold an open-air service for half an hour every Sunday afternoon, with singing, preaching and giving out gospel literature. This took place in the summer months of 1982 and 1983; some Chapel members then felt that Bibles and Christian books, primarily children's books, should be on sale. This was not approved – "selling on the Lord's Day could be a reflection on the name of the Church"; without it, the enterprise was not considered worthwhile and it was discontinued in 1984.<sup>19</sup> Looking back, one wonders whether, in this instance, the higher principle had prevailed.

In 1990, the Chapel supported opposition to the Government's Bill to remove all restrictions from Sunday trading in England and Wales.

---

<sup>17</sup> Elders' Minute, 2 March, 6 April 1955; Deacons' Minute, 2 March 1955.

<sup>18</sup> *Record*, March 1968, 8; Deacons' Minute, 7 February 1968.

<sup>19</sup> *Record*, June 1982, 9; December 1982, 10; Elders' Minute, 6 April 1983.

As the Chapel's representative on the "Keep Sunday Special" committee put it: "A day of rest is part of God's plan for all mankind. God cares about family and community life. A day in the week when almost everyone is free from work is essential for family life and for friendships to flourish by having time to spend together."<sup>20</sup> Through prayer and lobbying, encouraged by Christian Members of Parliament, it was the only Bill put forward by Margaret Thatcher's government to be defeated on the floor of the House.

### Temperance

The only other issue on which the Chapel has taken a public stance is "temperance". The Temperance (Scotland) Act 1920 introduced local plebiscites, on whether public houses should be closed or restricted in number. Evangelicals throughout Scotland called plebiscites in over 500 wards; Women's Guilds, Bands of Hope and other church agencies were marshalled into a massive campaign, especially in the cities.

Licensing was a live issue for a church in Rose Street; although the street was sparsely populated by end of the Great War, it still had nineteen public houses and the disorder, after closing time, was "disgraceful". With the encouragement of Graham Scroggie, the pastor of the Chapel at the time, the church actively supported the 1920 campaign for Edinburgh to go "dry". Chapel members canvassed from door to door with literature about "the curse of the drink traffic", seeking to get at least 35 per cent on the municipal register to vote for "no licence". The pastor, office-bearers and many members joined a "no licence" march in the Meadows on Saturday 16 October 1920, and arranged a rally in the Usher Hall, on the eve of the poll, attracting fifteen hundred people.

It took courage for businessmen to support such rallies, because the "trade" was pressing as strongly for increased sales as the churches were pressing for abolition. My maternal grandfather was the Manager of the Union Bank of Scotland. When the press reported that he had

---

<sup>20</sup> *Record*, October 1990, 8.



chaired a temperance meeting, the directors of one of Edinburgh's breweries, who had an account with the bank, closed it, saying they were not prepared to do business with "the opposition". The churches' stance against the drink trade – Baptist churches throughout Scotland had not one single licence-holder in membership in 1923 – may have driven a wedge between them and non-churchgoers, but they preached the gospel in order to liberate men, women and children from, among other things, slavery to alcohol.

When the result of the Edinburgh poll was declared, allowing the sale of liquor to continue, Chapel members were disappointed, but pledged to continue educating the public about "the awful bondage of drink". Bands of Hope generally went into decline after that disappointment, and the chairman of the Church of Scotland's temperance committee resigned in depression. However, the Chapel's Young Women's Temperance Association, formed in May 1926 with 55 members, ran a Band of Hope in the Cowgate every Friday and distributed temperance tracts along Rose Street. Graham Scroggie encouraged them to persevere with "the great task that is before the women of Scotland in helping to rid our country of one of its greatest menaces".

On Sunday 1 April 1928, the Chapel's evening service was given over to a temperance rally, with supporters from many outside organisations. Scroggie led the service and preached on the evils of the drink trade.

When preparations were being made for the Commonwealth Games in Edinburgh in 1970, the City Council proposed having bars inside the spectator areas of the stadium. On behalf of the Chapel and the Free Church of Scotland, I lodged objections with the Secretary of State for Scotland, pointing out the incongruity of having alcohol in a stadium dedicated to healthy living. The objections were successful; rereading them now, I realize how much society has changed in four decades, and yet how relevant the objections still are. They included:

... the degradation of moral character through the abuse of strong drink. Many crimes are committed under its influence, and much

anti-social behaviour stems from its influence. Many a man or woman under its influence has slipped into acts of immorality. Because their customary alertness and self-control had been weakened by alcoholic liquor, they consented to acts which they would never have tolerated if sober. ... to put alcoholic drink in the ways of those who are using the stadium is not a responsible attitude for a Local Authority to adopt.<sup>21</sup>

The Chapel was remarkably successful, between 1970 and 1991, in opposing the opening of new licensed premises and the extending of opening hours. In 1972, it successfully opposed the first modern attempt to open Edinburgh public houses on Sunday.<sup>22</sup> The three "pubs" near the Chapel applied in 1977, 1980 and 1990 for Sunday opening, and the Chapel successfully opposed all of them, partly on principle and partly because of the security measures necessary when people in the area were under the influence of drink.

The Chapel's last success was in 1990, when the public house nearest to the Chapel was again refused a Sunday licence. In 1991, the law was changed, and neighbours could no longer object. It was 1999 before this pub opened on a Sunday morning; fortunately, none of the anticipated disruption has followed.

### Worldliness

As this paper is about social involvement, it may be appropriate to mention the boundaries of permissible social activity for Chapel members in the middle years of the twentieth century. In 1939, the minister, Sidlow Baxter, added a question to the membership application: "As a Christian do you see the necessity of dissociating yourself from all such practices and pleasures as might be considered questionable or of a 'worldly' nature?"

---

<sup>21</sup> Elders' Minute, 5 February 1969; Deacons' Minute, 5 February 1969.

<sup>22</sup> *Record*, February 1972, 13-16.

Why was the question formulated in this way? Toward the end of the nineteenth century, partly as a reaction to the rise of Biblical criticism, many evangelical Christians retreated behind barricades, both theological and in terms of conduct. Joseph Kemp defined “worldliness” as smoking, drinking, card playing, dancing, novel reading, theatre and cinema going. He told the congregation, with approval, about a friend in the ministry whose work “has been chiefly amongst the card-playing, dancing, worldly Christians. Hundreds of mothers have withdrawn their children from the dancing schools, and many of the Church card parties have been smashed up, let us hope for ever.”

Eric Lomax, whose book *The Railwayman* was a best seller in 1995, was converted in the Chapel in 1936, and became engaged to be married to a Chapel girl, aged nineteen. In his book, he describes how their courtship consisted of “walking out together, avoiding the temptations of the city or the world. Dances and films and similar occasions of sin were out of the question for us; we visited each other’s houses, took long walks in the country and busied ourselves with Chapel affairs.”

A woman who married in the Chapel in 1949, at the age of 26, and who returned for her Golden Wedding in 1999, told me then about her early years in the Chapel. She was from a non-Christian home; she attended the Chapel from the age of fourteen, was converted, became active in youth work and was appointed a Guide leader. When she went, with her non-Christian parents, to a dinner-dance, this was held to be incompatible with leadership of a Chapel youth group, and she was compelled to resign. She was then asked to start a Guide troop at the Granton Baptist Church, which she did; she commented wryly to me, in 1999, about the different attitudes of the two churches.

When the stock of membership applications ran out in 1975, the elders agreed that the paragraph about disassociating “from ... practices ... of a worldly nature” was unduly negative, and they replaced it with a more positive question.

**Finally**

One of the Chapel's peer groups, covering the age range 45 to 65, invited a representative of the Telephone Samaritans to talk about their work. At question time, one of the group asked the speaker what he would say to a caller who phoned after taking an overdose that would soon prove fatal, and who was (for the purpose of the question) beyond the reach of the emergency services? Would he ask about the caller's faith? If the caller had none, would he introduce "personal faith" into the conversation? The Samaritan said that he would not do either, unless the caller raised it first – otherwise, he would talk soothingly until the line went dead. The questioner disapproved of the Samaritan's answer, and the Samaritan disapproved of the questioner's eagerness to bring faith into the conversation. There are different views of "evangelical social involvement".

*Edinburgh*